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THE EVOLUTION OF WHIST.¹

Only specialists in the subject are cognizant of the great amount of Whist literature that has appeared within the past few years, presenting the various details that cover the play of the modern game. No less than three new editions of standard works appeared last year, as also an original treatise by Mr. Hamilton, which gave in a copious form the most modern phase of the game in America. A fresh work just from the pen of Dr. Pole presents the subject in the rather new light of a gradual development from a very primitive type, through different stages to the organic form of the modern game. The various stages in this transition are successively taken up, and it is our purpose in the present review to set forth the ideas of the author as closely as is possible in the brief space allowed.

The work is admirably done, and the student of the game cannot but appreciate the method employed in knitting together into an organic whole the vast though rather isolated amount of material of the Whist world. After an introduction more or less explanatory of his attempt, our author takes up the various Whist eras, which we will consider in detail. In a review of the *Primitive Era*, from 1500 to 1730, the ground covered is pretty much the same as in the twenty-first edition of "Cavendish," to whom Dr. Pole constantly considers himself indebted. It is mainly from the investigations of "Cavendish" that any information is had of this embryo period of Whist. It seems to be quite well established from these investigations that the game is purely of English origin. Triumph — corrupted into Trump — in giving the predominance to one particular suit called

¹ *The Evolution of Whist* by Wm. Pole, F.R.S., Mus.Doc., (Oxon.). New York and London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1895.

Modern Scientific Whist by C. D. P. Hamilton. New York: Brentano, 1894.

the trump-suit, contained in this feature the essential foundation upon which the modern superstructure has been built. It was a game in common use in England early in the sixteenth century. The Italian game of Trionfi and La Triomphe, spoken of by Rabelais, must not be confounded with Trump or the English game, as a study of them proves that they are more closely related to Ecarté. A number of quotations from classic authors of this century show Trump to have been a favorite game in good society. About the beginning of the seventeenth century Ruff became a synonym for the game of Trump and is itself a name still preserved in Whist at the present day. The game had, however, undergone a material modification in having all advantages given to the four highest cards of the trump suit, these being called honors. How this was incorporated into Trump, whether simply as an addition to the original game, or from the coalescing of two games, is not known. Certainly the game became known as "Ruff and Honors." Each player received twelve cards, the four remaining cards of the pack being placed on the table, and the top one turned to establish the trump suit. The fortunate holder of the ace of the trump suit had the privilege of exchanging four of his cards for those on the table, this exchange being known as "ruffing." The score was nine, and those winning most tricks and honors were "most forward to win the set." This is Whist in a very imperfect form.

The name Whisk first occurs in 1621, and the origin of the word is rather doubtful. It may possibly be a word used in ridicule of the dress of the gallants of the day, who were especially given to the game. But, most probably, it is another form for "whist," attention, silence, as this became a synonym for the game some thirty or forty years later. The first true published description of the game was given in 1674 in "The Compleat Gamester," a curious book by Charles Cotton, the poet, in which he says it "is called Whist from the silence that is to be observed in the play." Each player still had twelve cards, but the deuces were dis-

carded from the pack before dealing, instead of the last four cards being left on the table. The ability to calculate as to the contents of the partner's hand was thereby considerably enhanced. The term "Swabbers" or "Swobbers" in connection with Whist, as indicative of the four honor cards, was common at one time. It was limited in its application, however, and soon passed out of use. Although we find Trump a favorite game in good society, Whist at this time was chiefly played in low places, mostly among cheats and swindlers. Such practically was the state of the game at the beginning of the era of Hoyle, 1730-1860, the whole object of the play being the winning of tricks. This was to be accomplished by the high cards held of a suit or by trumping. The holding and play of the master cards, of the ace as early as possible, the lead of a single card of a suit in order to trump when this suit might be subsequently led, were the main points in the policy and strategems of the game. This may be called the infancy stage in the development of Whist, and is possibly the form of game played by the majority of players at the present time, certainly by enormous numbers of domestic players. Yet they get a great amount of amusement out of the game, and though some of them might enjoy a more developed form of play, still, as they do get amusement and pleasure, there is no reason why they should not be left to their innocent, if infantile, recreation. It is still Whist, though undeveloped. As we have seen, Whist was a gambling game of taverns and low resorts; but about 1730, it was raised from its low associations to a higher plane, and has since that time been a source of great intellectual amusement. Lord Folkestone and a party of friends at the Crown Coffee-house in Bedford Row, tried the game and saw at once its merits. They began to study it, and shortly, definite principles were formulated, which began to take the place of the more or less primitive methods of the early era.

The genius of Edmund Hoyle was chiefly influential in presenting these principles in a more or less permanent

form. Although very little is known of him or his antecedents, and although he has been styled a gamester, nevertheless he was a man of good education, moved in good society, and was probably one of the party that met at the Crown. He thoroughly appreciated the game, taught it in a professional way, and gave his pupils manuscript notes on the rules and directions for play. The value of this instruction soon showed itself, and Hoyle found himself famous. In 1742, to protect himself in this method of instruction, he copyrighted in a published work his manuscript notes. This was the origin of the book that has immortalized his name. Certain changes had been made in the game, increasing the score to ten and using the entire pack. This improvement introduced the odd trick, which presents such an element of interest. Hoyle's game is precisely the form of long Whist ever since played. He lived long enough to see the game raised from its low position at the beginning of the century until it became a favorite in good society, and was even formally acknowledged as one of the royal amusements. He died, at the advanced age of ninety, in August, 1769. His work went through many editions, and his aims and endeavors were ably carried out by Payne and Matthews.

Payne's Maxims, incorporated upon Hoyle, foreshadowed the modern phase of the game. These improved editions of Hoyle were widely disseminated, and translations were circulated on the Continent, special study being devoted to them in Austria and France. France in particular received the game with enthusiasm, and in 1839 M. Deschapelles published his "*Traité de Whiste.*" Clay terms him the greatest Whist player the world had ever seen. It is reported of Deschapelles that his play was phenomenal in harassing second in hand, in never being himself disturbed as to his position, and in his ability to place cards by his aptitude in arriving at a correct probability.

Short Whist, or the game of five points, is said to have been commenced at a sitting in which Lord Peterborough

lost a large sum of money, when in order to make the game quicker and allow him more chance to recoup, the score was reduced from ten points to five. The excitement and interest given to the game by this change caused it to be accepted as the standard score, and it is the form of play in England at the present day.

“To play from the strongest suit ; To study your partner’s hand as much as your own ; Never to force your partner unnecessarily ; and To attend to the score,” constituted the principle advances made by Hoyle over the primitive game. The advantage of retaining the master cards, and hence the command of the suit, that is, the establishment of the long suit ; the advantage of disarming the adversaries when holding a long and strong trump hand, and thus making a strong suit instead of gaining tricks by trumping in ; and the advantages of drawing correct inferences from the fall of the cards as to those remaining in the players’ hands — were advances invaluable to the development of the game. This last feature of play has always been peculiarly acceptable to intelligent players as giving them scope to exercise their powers of intellect and to profit therefrom. It practically prevailed in the best Whist circles unchanged for more than a century, and, although in later years progressing in form, it still numbers among its votaries a large class of intellectual and acute players.

About 1850, a party of students at Cambridge, appreciating the vast scope of study offered by the game, as well as the amusement accruing therefrom, commenced a systematic study of Whist with the idea of arriving at its complete scientific basis. They continued these investigations after leaving the University, and were joined by Mr. Henry Jones, a brother of one of the party, then a student of medicine. The “Little Whist School” studied the game in earnest, making notes on all interesting hands, and submitting points of difficulty to James Clay, who was acknowledged to be the best Whist player in Europe. A large amount of information was thus gathered, which was es-

pecially valuable because derived from systematic experiment and philosophical deduction. After 1860 the little school ceased to meet, but the notes were preserved by Henry Jones, and became the basis of "The Principles of Whist," published by "Cavendish" in 1862. Two years later, Clay published "A Treatise on Short Whist," and these two works presented the improvements which had resulted from the scientific investigations as well as practice of the greatest Whist minds since Deschappelles. It was at this time that the author of the work under review presented his deductions from the study of these works, in an essay, "On the Theory of the Modern Scientific Game of Whist," in which he showed the undeniable evidence of a tendency towards a single great principle, "the more perfect cultivation than formerly of the relations between the partners, so as to effect, as far as possible, a combination of the hands." This idea had, however, existed before, although not in developed form, as is seen from the following quotation from the preface of a work by the Baron de Vautré in 1847: "The author teaches the mode of playing with twenty-six cards, and not with thirteen, like all the rest of the world."

The value of the combination of hands, and the mutual play thereby resulting, was also presented in a rational treatise on the game by von Cöckelberghle-Dützele, of Vienna, in 1843. In 1864, this idea had become well established as a Whist principle, and as a result of a joint meeting between committees of the Arlington and Portland Clubs, Baldwin published "The Laws of Short Whist," which is still regarded as the standard authority on Whist Law in England. It may therefore be said that since 1860 the philosophical game has held sway among the most intellectual players, combination being made the basis of play, in place of the merely accidental or single-hand plan which had previously prevailed. The lead from the long suit; the endeavor to "establish" this suit, holding sufficient strength in trumps; the lead of trumps, holding five, with this idea in view; the care to be taken in forcing part-

ner when strong in trumps; the reverse in the case of the adversaries; the establishment of the trump call; the fearless trumping in when second in hand and weak in trumps; the reverse when holding trump strength; the indication of the high cards held by the lead of a high card; the duty towards your partner of assisting him in the management of his long suit; the giving of all information to your partner as to your holding, even if such information is likewise imparted to the adversaries; the manner of drawing inferences and a mathematical study of probabilities, with play from sequences—formed the ruling principles in the game.

The past twenty-five years have only added more studious attention to details. It is certainly most astonishing to observe what an insight into the hand of his partner an acute and observant player may gain by noting carefully and legitimately the fall of the cards, and the logical inferences to be drawn therefrom. As Clay has well said, "Whist is a language and every card played is an intelligible sentence." One of the greatest points gained in the philosophical game over the game of Hoyle is the ease and facility with which it can be imparted to others. Hoyle's game was a most tedious and difficult one to master, and there was need of his personal care and attention to impart a clear insight into it. His book was hardly more than a series of notes on his personal teaching. The modern structure is, however, built on a firm and wide foundation; and the general consistent and intelligent design, seen even in the minutest details, and running through the entire system of play, makes an organic whole most beautiful, pleasurable, and useful. The consequence is that, whereas, the intricacy and difficulty of Hoyle's game, kept the majority of men from a true conception of it, and allowed only a few persons of superior minds to attain to its mastery and so reach the acme of true pleasure to be derived therefrom, the game has now become a possibility of pleasure and enjoyment, in a truly

intellectual way, to all men of ordinary education and intelligence. As a result the modern game is played by thousands, where tens learned the game of Hoyle.

The study of the game is the study of a science, and just as in every study the ground has to be broken in the right way, with the right spirit, so in Whist, the rule of thumb work, the memorizing of minute details as a test of memory, should be forever relegated to oblivion. Each fact, each rule, has its why and wherefore, which to the true student, is the sum and substance of his intellectual enjoyment. In this connection a few words relative to the signal for trumps, "The Blue Peter," as it has been humorously termed, may be of interest. It was first used in 1851, and has been incorporated in every work on Whist since that date. Itself the outgrowth of the scientific method used in the discard of a worthless high card to entice the adversary to lead trumps, in order to make his suit, it grew to be used as an indication to the partner that trumps were desired. So it became the first of the conventions which expanded, about 1885, to such an extent, especially in the American form of play. The signal did have, at one time, just the opposite interpretation in showing a desire to "ruff." Although criticised as a convention, it has still been approved and adopted by the best authorities.

In the chapter on Developments, the foundation for the leads is quite thoroughly discussed. "Cavendish," after repeated suggestions, at last obtained a mode of play by which the number of cards of a suit in the hand might be told. The lead of a small card and afterwards the fall of a smaller indicated the holding of five in the suit. The after play of a higher indicated four. The ultimate and penultimate therefore became the method of play, and Drayson introduced the ante-penultimate, in 1879, to indicate the holding of six. In the presentation of the subject by Mr. Nicholas Browse Trist, of New Orleans, the system of "American Leads" came before the world. Instead of the number of the suit being determined by the low card

play, the relative value of the card led to the higher cards held was considered the essential principle. The lead of the fourth best, as a low-card lead, showing exactly three higher cards in value, neither more nor less, is obviously a simple way of looking at the suit. It was practically the same as had been practised in the ultimate, penultimate and ante-penultimate leads, but, by its greater simplicity, conduced to more valuable conclusions. The subtraction of the face-value of the low card led from eleven, by some known as "the rule of eleven," gives a most convenient way to indicate the number of cards in the suit higher than the card led and not in the leader's hand. The next practical convention introduced by Mr. Trist was the use of indifferent high cards to indicate the number held, the higher showing four and the lower, five in suit. The following may be given as the results of Mr. Trist's additions to the game:

1. "When you open a suit with a low card, lead your fourth best."
2. "On quitting the head of your suit, lead your original fourth best."
3. "With two indifferent high cards, lead the higher if you open a suit of four; the lower, if you open a suit of five."

Although there has been considerable question and controversy in regard to these principles, their incorporation into the sixteenth edition of "Cavendish's" work in 1886, has led to their general establishment as rules of practice. "Cavendish" introduced the "Echo" to the trump call in 1874, indicating the holding of four trumps. The "Signal," subsequent to an opportunity to call for trumps, or after having led, is generally received as an indication of the holding of four trumps. Another point of the greatest importance in the modern game is the bringing in of the partner's long suit by unblocking to it, so as to enable him to keep the command. These developments have been combatted considerably, and certain of the conventions are

not now practised by some of the acutest players of the time, yet the tendency is towards their use, and they will probably continue to be the most approved form of play of the most advanced and intellectual players of the game.

Dr. Pole's chapter on "Whist in America" presents quite clearly the main points of difference between the play in this country and in England. During the past three years, the introduction with us of the duplicate game, a method of replay of the same hands by the adversaries, has eliminated in large measure the element of luck in the simple fall of the cards. Some complaint is made against it on the ground of its lessening the opportunity for brilliant plays, as offered at certain stages of the point game. A history of the American Whist League is given, and mention is made of the revival of the professional teaching of the game, especially by women. An accurate list of Whist publications in America is included, in which "Modern Scientific Whist," by C. D. P. Hamilton, 1894, is accorded the leading position. The latter book presents a thoroughly detailed study of the game, and is probably more useful to students in this country than in England, as the acuter modern developments are more widespread here, and there is decidedly greater popularity for the game. The question of conventions, especially of a private nature, seems to be the greatest point agitating the American players at the present time. In our author's opinion, so long as there is no secret understanding between partners, but the convention is an open one to all players, there is no objection to its use.

In the "Summary," the game is traced from its small beginnings three centuries ago, through the primitive game, the game of Hoyle or the game of accidents, to the philosophical game, with its modern, or "latter-day" improvements. Infantile, accidental, and chance play now give way to observation, absolute and perfect attention, inference, memory, promptness of decision, and soundness of judgment. These qualities constitute the fine player. Four

appendices, giving some model Whist hands in the early stages of the game, the Constitution of the American Whist League, the American Laws of Whist, and examples of matches played in duplicate at American Whist Tournaments, finally close the book.

Although Dr. Pole does not claim any originality for his work, still its manner of presentation, its interesting content of fact and anecdote, make it an exceedingly timely and valuable treatise. His unfailing courtesy and consideration for American players and the American game will win for him increased admiration in a country where he is already well known and where he deserves to have as many readers as there are devotees of the most fascinating and intellectual of games.

WM. B. HALL, JR.